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Hawk on the High Seas: Emma Wightman '17 to Sail Across the Atlantic with SEA Semester

Upper-level science undergrads from across the country will investigate global climate change while aboard a 134-foot brigantine en route from the Canary Islands to St. Croix



The SSV Corwith Cramer, SEA's state-of-the-art 134-foot brigantine, will serve as the students' home, classroom and laboratory for a six-week open-ocean voyage to St. Croix in the Caribbean.

October 15, 2015 | Public Affairs Staff

WOODS HOLE, MASS. – This fall, Roger Williams University environmental science major and Livingston, N.J., native Emma Wightman '17 is joining a distinguished class of upper-level science undergraduates who will sail an oceanographic research vessel across the world's second-largest ocean to investigate one of the foremost scientific challenges of their generation: global climate change.

Through [SEA Semester: Oceans & Climate](#), a selective study abroad program offered by the [Sea Education Association](#), the students will take to the high seas to examine firsthand the ocean's role in the global carbon cycle and climate dynamics and apply their knowledge to pressing public policy questions.

On Sept. 28, the class arrived at SEA Semester's campus in the oceanographic research community of Woods Hole, Mass., for six initial weeks of intensive scientific and policy coursework on shore. With guidance from SEA Semester faculty and area ocean science and policy experts, they have been tackling complex questions on climate, sustainability and policy, and designing their own research projects to be completed at sea.

In early November, the group will fly to the Canary Islands to meet the SSV *Corwith Cramer*, SEA's state-of-the-art 134-foot brigantine, which will serve as their home, classroom and laboratory for a six-week open-ocean voyage to St. Croix in the Caribbean. Along the way, the students will become working members of the ship's crew and use advanced oceanographic instruments to research diverse marine ecosystems in the Atlantic Ocean. They will implement their experimental design, analyze their collected data, and present their scientific findings in peer-reviewed poster sessions at the end of the program.



Wightman's involvement with SEA Semester is no coincidence. A lifelong sailor, her ambition has always been to study on the open ocean – the RWU affiliation with SEA Semester even factored into her decision to attend the University.

"I have always loved the ocean, so I decided to study it," Wightman says. "I hope to get a feel for how fieldwork research is done on the ocean and perform experiments that jump-start research I will do later in my career at Roger Williams and in the real world."

The SSV *Corwith Cramer's* ports of call form a unique lens for delving into climate science and policy. The class will examine approaches employed by the Canary Islands, which is harnessing abundant renewable resources in innovative hydrowind energy systems that dramatically reduce reliance on fossil fuels. They will then compare such strategies to those used by small Caribbean islands moving toward sustainable development, ecological conservation, and proactive coastal zone management.

"Students in Oceans and Climate form a strong working team as they conduct and then communicate their own oceanographic and policy research about climate," says Erin Bryant, the program's assistant professor of ocean and coastal policy. "They are practicing skills they will need as they dive into their own oceans-and-climate-related careers."

With an anticipated second major in marine biology to complement her current study in environmental science, Wightman's aspiration to study climate change and its effects on the ocean is an ideal fit for the program.

"They work us very hard here, but the information is exciting and new," she says. "We do charting, celestial navigation, classes on life at sea, weather observations and more. It's so exciting you don't mind doing the work!"

As Wightman readies to set sail across the Atlantic, she looks forward to an experience that few college students have, on more than one level: "I'm excited to wake up and see nothing but the sea, every day... I'm also excited about being totally unplugged, since we'll have no communication with the outside world while we're on the boat."

Wightman is not the first RWU student to journey onto the high seas with SEA Semester – last spring, environmental science and marine biology major Michael Torselli '16 (from Prospect, Conn.) was one of 24 students on the SSV *Robert C. Seamans*, which sailed from Christchurch, New Zealand, to Tahiti, exploring port stops in the Chatham Islands and Tubuai as they studied the effects of climate change in the South Pacific.

Read posts by Torselli on the [SEA Currents blog](#) now or follow Wightman in her wake via the same blog, where the students will document their voyage once under way on Nov. 14.